

(10-MC)

Disability Awareness Month

CULTIVATING MEDIA PLACEMENT

This packet includes ideas on how to get your story or issued covered by assignment editors at print and electronic media and how to conduct a Media Watch to help reporters become better informed about the appropriate ways to portray people with disabilities or disability issues.

Another Awareness month packet that might be useful in working with the media is Media Public Service Announcements. To download this or other packets in MS Word, please visit the Council website at: www.in.state/gpcpd

MEDIA WATCH

How to Participate in Media Watch

Read your local/regional newspapers daily and be on the lookout for television or radio programs that feature a person with a disability or a disability-related issue. It might help to have a notepad near your television or radio so you will be ready to jot down the facts of a media presentation.

After encountering a portrayal of an individual with a disability (positive or negative), respond to the media source as soon as possible. Simply use the enclosed sample letter, or if you have time write your own letter (See the enclosed suggested paragraphs for composing your own letter). Use personal stationary or organization letterhead or a good quality white bond paper. Sign it and mail it with a copy of the attached *Guidelines for Reporting and Writing about People with Disabilities*. Typed letters are preferable, but handwritten letters are also fine. In your letter

be sure to **Praise** journalists who appropriately portray people with disabilities/disability issues, and **educate** journalists who use inappropriate portrayals of people with disabilities/disability issues.

Tips for Writing a Successful Letter

1. **Be Timely.** Write your letter as soon as possible after the article is published or the story is aired.
2. **Keep It Simple.** One page should be plenty to convey your message while still keeping the attention of the reader. Edit your letters to make them easier to read.
3. **Use Facts.** Relay the details of the media presentation or news article accurately (date, page number, name of news program, journalist, etc).
4. **Be Polite.** You will be more likely to get your point across if you assume a journalist is uninformed about disability issues but willing to learn about more appropriate portrayals.
5. **Be Helpful.** Offer yourself, or any organization to which you belong as a resource on disability issues for the journalist.
6. **Be Personal.** Identify yourself as a reader/viewer/listener and mention your organization if applicable. Personal letters from media customers are very effective.
7. **Follow-through.** If you receive a response to your letter that you disagree with, or if the media organization continues portraying people with disabilities in an inappropriate manner, revise your letter and resend it.

EDITORIAL PLACEMENT

What Makes a Good Story?

Editors at local print and electronic media are always interested in a “good story.” So what makes a story idea attract an editor’s attention? For most editors, one or more of the following characteristics make a story newsworthy:

- **Information** – provides facts that readers/listeners/viewers don’t already know.
- **Timeliness** – relates to upcoming community events and allows time for people to take advantage of the information.
- **Significance** – will affect the lives of readers/listeners/viewers.

- **Scope** – impacts a majority of community members.
- **Interest** – attracts and holds attention, sometimes because of famous participants.
- **Uniqueness** – is unlike other information/event.
- **Human interest** – stirs empathy in readers/listeners/viewers.
- **Relevance** – enhances public understanding of a constant or pressing local issue.

When working with media, you will find that assignment editors – from print media, radio or television – are not all alike and will not all agree on what is “news.” Perseverance; a helpful, friendly attitude; and knowing when to say “thank you anyway” will be your greatest assets when dealing with the media.

Below are some step-by-step guidelines that will help you place editorial materials with your local media.

Story Ideas

Try to generate story ideas. Remember, the story idea must fit the media format. For example, television requires a very “visual” story that will make for good film footage. A simple interview with an expert is often not enough. Children participating in a simulated blindness demonstration, however, would provide interesting visual material. Radio programs would welcome experts on controversial topics, such as “inclusion.” These experts make for interesting call-in shows. Daily newspapers favor stories with a universal human interest angle and a visual side for good photos. Weeklies are more likely to use black-and-white photos you provide. Other publications, such as newsletters for local organizations or companies, might have other requirements.

Special events, such as barrier awareness demonstrations, can provide good media opportunities, especially if a celebrity or political leader participates. You can also request on-the-air mentions from personalities such as weather people or popular radio personalities.

Media Contacts

Call your local media and explain what organization you are with and that you are planning activities in conjunction with Disability Awareness Month (See enclosed Media Resources). Ask to talk to the news director for radio or television, or the assignment editor of the newspaper. If you are interested in getting a story on a certain radio or television show or in a particular section of a print publication, such as business or lifestyle, ask who is in charge of that

show or section. Present your idea confidently, without being pushy, and explain its value to the publication or station's audience. If the editor/news director is interested, ask how much time he or she needs to develop the story, what types of story ideas are of interest to their publication or station and how you can best help them. At that point, you will probably be referred to a reporter. If the news person rejects one idea, mention some others. Ask if you can send your ideas in a letter. Be sure to get the correct spelling of the person's name, his or her correct title and the current mailing address.

You should personalize the enclosed editorial placement sample letter according to your discussion of story ideas. Include your organization's name with some background information, a listing of local awareness activities, a contact person and phone number, and specific details about the story idea and arrangements for helping the story come about (i.e., times experts are available for interviews, times when visually appealing events are taking place and sources for background information on the topic). A week or so after mailing the letter, you might want to place a follow-up call if you have not received a response.

Statewide News Release

A copy of the Disability Awareness Month news release will be mailed statewide to daily and weekly newspapers in mid-February. When you talk to your local media representatives, mention the release. Ask if they received it and if they can use the material or would like you to provide names of local people who could address disability topics. If they have not received the release, contact Kim Dennison at (317) 631-6400 (voice), (317) 631-6499 (fax) or kdennison@bjmpr.com (e-mail) and she will promptly send another copy to them.

Developing a News Release or Media Advisory

In addition to the Council's March Awareness Month press release you may want to issue a news release as another way to get media coverage for your own event. Depending on the event you can send a media advisory giving the date time and purpose or a longer news release in the form of a story written in third person that might be run in a smaller paper as is or used as the basis for a story in a larger paper.

Top Ten News Release Tips

1. Make sure the information is newsworthy.

2. Tell the audience that the information is intended for them and why they should continue to read it.
3. Start with a brief description of the news, then distinguish who announced it, and not the other way around.
4. Ask yourself, "How are people going to relate to this and will they be able to connect?"
5. Make sure the first 10 words of your release are effective, as they are the most important.
6. Write it like a news article and avoid excessive use of adjectives and fancy language.
7. Deal with the facts.
8. Provide as much contact information as possible: Individual to contact, address, phone, fax, email, Web site address.
9. Make sure you wait until you have something with enough substance to issue a release.
10. Make it as easy as possible for media representatives to do their jobs.

(For specific formatting guidelines see the attached News Release and Media Advisory Format)

Calendar Listings

A good way to get information to the public about a Disability Awareness Month event is through the calendar or upcoming events section of your local paper. Check your paper to see if it has this column. If so, call to get the contact's name. Once you have the appropriate contact person, send him or her written information, including what your event is who is participating, and the time, date and place of your event. Note in the information that the event is open to the public and free of charge, if that is the case (sample calendar release enclosed).

Interview Preparation

Being prepared for an interview does a great deal to make the interview a success. You or your designated "expert" will provide a better interview if some time is taken beforehand to familiarize yourself with the subject matter. Knowing the subject matter well is the best line of defense. Generate a list of questions the reporter might ask and develop answers.

Another point to remember is to use full names (not nicknames) and specific times ("March 1" rather than "recently") and places. Give complete answers rather than a plain "yes" or "no." "Talk in headlines," getting main points across first. Know the name, address and phone number of an appropriate contact person(s) or organization(s).

For television interviews, look at the interviewer rather than the camera. Ask the producer in advance if he or she would like to use any appropriate visuals (slides, posters, photos, brochures, films or videotapes). Arrive at the studio on time. Dress comfortably and conservatively. Find a comfortable seated position that looks good.

While the above suggestions will help make a smooth and effective interview, the most important thing to remember is to RELAX!

Assist the Media

Try to assist the media representative as much as possible. You will function as the liaison between the news person and the expert. Offer to provide sample questions, if the news person wants them. You should be able to provide directions to events and proper dates and times. Let the news person determine scheduling as often as possible. Though it might not be wise to press the person to follow through with your story idea, it is appropriate to ask when a story will be printed or aired so that you can clip a copy or have it recorded.

Follow Up

Whenever you receive media coverage, follow up with a thank you letter. A sample is enclosed. Please use this as a guide and personalize your letter with appropriate information. The news person will appreciate the courtesy of a sincere “thanks.” It might be appropriate to have the executive director/chairperson of your organization sign the letter.

Sometimes a reporter with the best intentions inadvertently uses language in a story that creates negative impressions of people with disabilities. Examples include “the handicapped” or “the disabled person.” If you receive such media coverage, send a thank you letter, but also include suggestions and a set of guidelines for correct language when referring to people with disabilities (enclosed sample letter). Use the information suggested in the Media Watch section of this packet. Be sure to include a copy of “*Guidelines for Reporting and Writing about People with Disabilities*.”

MEDIA WATCH LETTERS SAMPLE PARAGRAPHS FOR LETTERS

If you wish to write your own letter rather than using the following prepared letter, the *sample texts below* might give you some “starting points.” There are sample beginnings, middle paragraphs and/or endings to guide you when writing your own letters.

Sample Beginnings or Introductions

- I would like to take this opportunity to call to your attention an article in your paper that inappropriately portrayed a person with a disability as being a hero simply for living with a disability. (John Doe’s) accomplishments should be valued for themselves, not because (John Doe) accomplished them while having a disability.
- On (date), newscaster (Mary Johnson) led a story on Medicaid by saying “the crippled are confined to more than wheelchairs (or other inappropriate language).” While I appreciate your attention to the problems of Medicaid for people with disabilities, I would like to point out to you the inappropriate usage of language describing people with disabilities by (Ms. Johnson.)
- I am writing in response to an article entitled “Disabled Boy Makes Good” that appeared in the (local paper) on (month, date, and year) on page (xx).
- I was very pleased to see your story on (Jane Smith) on the (date) edition of (program). While (Jane Smith) has visual impairments, your story focused on her talent as a violinist and her recital at the Opera House rather than on her disability.
- I am writing to thank (reporter) for his article on how the Americans with Disabilities Act has positively affected the lives of people with disabilities.

Sample Middle Paragraphs

Regarding: Disability as a Human Interest Story

While I realize that the life of a person with a disability seems like a good human interest story, there is a problem with the message this piece conveys. What the public learns from these stories is that if people with disabilities are simply “heroic,” we (they) can overcome any physical problem. However, the real problems people with disabilities face are not their own physical barriers, but are problems caused by societal barriers, such as a lack of curb cuts or interpreters and blatant job discrimination. The real human interest story is the story of the long fight for disability rights by the disability community.

Regarding: Person with Disability as Average Citizen

Approximately 54 million Americans have some kind of physical, sensory, cognitive or mental disability. People with disabilities are average American citizens and portraying them (us) as anything other than that results in marginalizing a large class of people. Thus, when covering an accomplishment (positive or negative) of a person who has a disability, please do not focus on the person's disability. Only mention a person's disability if the story is based on that disability.

Regarding: Language

In your article on (Professor Johnson's) new book on (?), you describe him as "suffering from ____" and "confined to a wheelchair." These terms have negative connotations that do not accurately describe the life of (Professor Johnson) nor of people with disabilities in general.

Instead of "suffering from __," (Professor Johnson) is simply a person who has _____. Similarly, (Professor Johnson) is not "confined to a wheelchair," but uses a wheelchair to get around. The terms used in your article evoke pity for (Professor Johnson) rather than respect.

The words and phrases used to describe people with disabilities help shape people's perceptions. A person with a disability should always be referred to as a *person* first and not by his or her disability. Also, grouping individuals together as "the mentally retarded" or "the handicapped" puts the focus on the disability, rather than on the individual. The enclosed brochure and bookmark describe in more detail the use of appropriate language for people with disabilities.

Regarding: The Americans with Disabilities Act

The Americans with Disabilities Act, signed into law on July 26, 1990, plays a vital role in creating a culture of independence among people with disabilities in the workplace. There have been surprisingly few lawsuits filed nationwide regarding the ADA. As of 1995, only about 650 suits had been filed with the Department of Justice (Department of Justice, 7/95).

The Americans with Disabilities Act is not an unfunded mandate. Rather, the ADA is a civil rights law similar to the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Sample Letter Endings

Thank you in advance for sharing this information with others on your staff. If you would like any additional information, please do not hesitate to call me.

Again, I would like to thank you for your positive portrayal of people with disabilities in your (newspaper/news program/etc.).

Dear Media Representative:

I would like to provide you with some resource materials to use when writing about people with disabilities.

One of the hallmarks of disability awareness is that people with disabilities be portrayed as individuals who are independent, productive and active community members. Thus, in writing and speaking about people with disabilities, the preferred usage is “People First Language.”

The basic premise behind “People First Language” is that people with disabilities are indeed *people* first. Thus, when one is speaking or writing about a person with a disability, it is more respectful and appropriate to focus on the person first rather than his or her disability. For example, rather than saying “the disabled,” say “person with a disability,” and rather than saying “afflicted with blindness,” say “a person who is blind.”

To further assist you in promoting “People First Language” among your staff and your readers, we are pleased to share the enclosed “*Guidelines for Reporting and Writing About People with Disabilities*”, a very helpful resource written especially for the media.

Please share this information with your staff. If you have any further questions about “People First Language” or the Americans with Disabilities Act, please contact me.

Sincerely,

MEDIA RESOURCES AND TIME FRAMES

Media Contacts

Internet Media Guide by zip code:

<http://capwiz.com/thearc/dbq/media>

At the website you can type in your zip code for a list of media contacts for your area.

You can even search for a reporter by name and compose and send e-mail from the same location.

Web Page links:

There are several websites that will let you link directly to the web pages of Indiana media including radio, TV and newspapers. Most website have instructions on how to submit letters to the editor or contact editors or reporters

- Links to media web pages by name: <http://www.disastercenter.com/indiana/media.html>
- A longer list of media websites alpha by city: <http://www.abyznewslinks.com/unitein.htm>

Planning Time Tips

To encourage coverage of Awareness Month activities it's important to know deadlines. Media outlets are not all the same. When you contact the media depends on what type of coverage is desired. Following are some rules of thumb about media deadlines:

Radio and Television Public Service Announcements: Most stations prefer to have PSA scripts from four to six weeks in advance of planned air dates.

Radio and Television Event Coverage: Mail media advisories one to two weeks prior to your event. Follow up by phone a day or two before the event.

Daily Publications: If you are planning an event and want people to attend, mail the release at least two or three weeks in advance. For calendar sections, verify the deadlines, because they are often different than normal deadlines. If you want to generate coverage of a special event, mail a release at least a week in advance and follow up by phone a day or two before the event.

Weekly Publications: Deadlines at weekly papers are generally about a week before publication, so mail releases at least two weeks in advance.

Magazines: Magazines work two to three months in advance. Therefore, you might not be able to place announcements of your event. However, you can contact magazine editors to encourage

coverage of your Awareness Month activities or to encourage them to interview experts or persons with disabilities.

News Release and Media Advisory Format

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 1, 2007

Contact: Erik Johnson
(317) 123-4567
ABC Organization
Myra Cocca
(317) 123-4567
ABC Organization

**ABC Organization announces
new format for media materials**

Indianapolis -- ABC Organization recently announced that it has finalized a standardized format for news releases. The change follows the official ABC Organization guidebook.

To comply with the ABC Organization news release format, write the words “FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE” in all caps in the upper left-hand corner of the page. The date the news is to be released should fall directly under “FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE.” List the names of two contact persons, their phone numbers and company names in the upper right-hand corner of the first page.

Underneath the date and contact name, write the headline in cap/lowercase style, bold and 14 point type. If the headline is more than one line, single-space the lines. Triple-space the headline from the copy.

Double-space the body of the release and indent each new paragraph. Do not break paragraphs at the end of a page. Also, center the word “more” -- with dashes on either side of it -
- at the bottom of each continuing page.

To draw attention to important information you don’t want to place at the end of the release, highlight the information in bold at the bottom of the first page of the release.

-more-

ABC Organization/page 2---

The name of the city where the news is taking place should begin the first paragraph of the release, which is not indented. Follow the city name with two dashes (--) and the lead paragraph. Do not include the name of the state if the city is Indianapolis, because Indianapolis is on the Associated Press list of most recognizable U.S. cities and, therefore, does not need to be followed by a state name.

At the top left-hand corner of all pages, except page one, write one or two words describing the release, a slash mark and then the page number (ABC Organization/page 2). Do not spell out page numbers.

Three number symbols centered (# # #) at the bottom of the last page of the release tell the reader there are no more pages.

#

Editor's Note. It is appropriate to place editors' notes, photo opportunities, etc. below the "###." If such notes are included, the words "editor's note" or "photo opportunity" should be italicized, not bold. Single-space the copy.

March 1, 2007

Contact:

Myra Cocca
(317) 123-4567
ABC Organization

Media Advisory

What ABC Organization announces its new media advisory format.

When May 10, 2002, 2:15 p.m.

Where ABC Organization conference room

Why In an effort to make company media materials more consistent, ABC Organization has decided upon this particular format for media advisories.

Some items to note regarding the new media advisory format:

- The headline is cap/lowercase, bold, 14 point type
- The “Who, What, Where . . .” are cap/lowercase, bold, and without colons
- The contact name is in the upper right-hand corner of the page, followed by the phone number and the company name underneath
- Use the number symbols (# # #) to indicate the end of the advisory

Note Do not feel compelled to use every word in the “Who, What, Where, When, Why and How” series. Use only those categories that allow you to best present the information. You might want to use “Note” as a category.

#

(Sample Calendar Release)

Calendar Release

For Immediate Release
(Date)

Contact:
(Your Name)
(Your phone)

The ABC Organization is hosting “Disability Awareness Day” (from X a.m. to X p.m., Monday, March ___, at the Anytown City Hall). The event will include (describe activities). For more information, contact (Joe Smith at 123-4567).

#

(Sample Letter to Media Contacts –Editorial Placement)

(Date)

(Mr. John Doe)
(Title)
(XYZ Media)
(123 Main Street)
(Anytown, Indiana 46000)

Dear (Mr. Doe):

Thank you for talking with me about Disability Awareness Month and some of the activities the (Anytown Support Group for People with Disabilities) is planning.

As we discussed over the phone, several opportunities exist during Disability Awareness Month for coverage of community awareness events, educational topics and disability-related issues. The disability community is one of the fastest-growing populations in the United States, and it's important that people in our community are educated about this topic.

The (Anytown Support Group for People with Disabilities) appreciates your willingness to help in this effort. I look forward to working with you on (producing this show/developing this story). If you have any questions, need further assistance or would like to schedule a special interview with (_____), please call me at (123-4567).

Sincerely,

(Your Name)
(Title)

(Sample Thank You Letter - Editorial Placement)

(Date)

(Mr. John Doe)
(Title)
(XYZ Media)
(123 Main Street)
(Anytown, Indiana 46000)

Dear (Mr. Doe):

Thank you for increasing our community's awareness of Disability Awareness Month by (publishing the special story, "_____"; interviewing _____ on "show"; etc.).

Your story reminded our community that people with disabilities are people first and are contributing members of society. It is important to eliminate the physical and attitudinal barriers for people with disabilities. Through informative stories like yours, our community will better understand this need.

The (Anytown Support Group for People with Disabilities) appreciates your support, and we would be happy to serve as a source of information for any future articles that relate to people with disabilities.

Sincerely,

(Your Name)
(Title)

(Sample Thank You Letter – Editorial Placement - With Suggestions for Appropriate Language)

(Date)

(Mr. John Doe)

(Title)

(XYZ Media)

(123 Main Street)

(Anytown, Indiana 46000)

Dear (Mr. Doe):

Thank you for your recent article/broadcast about our organization/event. Although we always appreciate coverage about people with disabilities and the issues that concern them, it is also important to realize that the way a reporter tells a story can make a significant difference in how people with disabilities are perceived in the community.

Reporting on the disability community is just like reporting on any other minority group; there are “correct” words and phrases to use. The Indiana Governor’s Council for People with Disabilities and other disability organizations emphasize “people first” language that focuses on the person first, with the disability as secondary. For example, *woman who is deaf* is preferred over *deaf woman*. In addition, *people with disabilities* is preferred over *the handicapped* or *the disabled*.

I have enclosed “Guidelines for Reporting and Writing about People with Disabilities.” The guidelines explain preferred terminology when reporting about people with disabilities and reflect the input of more than 100 national disability organizations.

If you ever have a question these guidelines don’t address, please feel free to contact me. Again, we appreciate your coverage of our organization and people with disabilities in general.

Sincerely,

(Your Name)

(Title)

Enclosure

Guidelines for Reporting and Writing About People with Disabilities

When writing, it's important to be concise, particularly in journalism. However, sometimes the effort to limit wordiness leads to inappropriate references to people with disabilities. The following guidelines explain preferred terminology and reflect input from more than 100 national disability organizations. These guidelines have been reviewed and endorsed by media and disability experts throughout the country. Although opinions may differ on some terms, the guidelines represent the current consensus among disability organizations. Portions of the guidelines have been adopted into the "Associated Press Stylebook," a basic reference for professional journalists.

DO NOT FOCUS ON DISABILITY unless it is crucial to a story. Avoid tear-jerking human interest stories about incurable diseases, congenital impairments or severe injury. Focus instead on issues that affect the quality of life for those individuals, such as accessible transportation, housing, affordable health care, employment opportunities and discrimination.

PUT PEOPLE FIRST, not their disability. Say "woman with arthritis," "children who are deaf" or "people with disabilities." This puts the focus on the individual, not the particular functional limitation. Despite editorial pressures to be succinct, it is never acceptable to use "crippled," "deformed," "suffers from," "victim of," "the retarded," "the deaf and dumb," etc.

DO NOT SENSATIONALIZE A DISABILITY by writing "afflicted with," "crippled with," "suffers from," "victim of" and so on. Instead, write "person who has multiple sclerosis" or "man who had polio."

DO NOT USE GENERIC LABELS for disability groups, such as "the retarded" or "the deaf." Emphasize people, not labels. Say "people with mental retardation" or "people who are deaf."

EMPHASIZE ABILITIES, not limitations. For example:

- Correct: "uses a wheelchair/braces" or "walks with crutches"
- Incorrect: "confined to a wheelchair," "wheelchair-bound" or "crippled"

Similarly, do not use emotional descriptors such as "unfortunate," "pitiful" and similar phrases.

Disability groups also strongly object to using euphemisms to describe disabilities. Terms such as "handi-capable," "mentally different," "physically inconvenienced" and "physically challenged" are considered condescending. They reinforce the idea that disabilities cannot be dealt with directly and candidly.

SHOW PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AS ACTIVE participants in society. Portraying persons with disabilities interacting with people without disabilities in social and work environments helps break down barriers and open lines of communications.

DO NOT PORTRAY SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AS SUPERHUMAN. Many people with disabilities do not want to be “hero-ized.” Like many people without disabilities, they wish to be fully included in our communities and do not want to be judged based on unreasonable expectations.

DO NOT IMPLY DISEASE when discussing disabilities that result from a prior disease episode. People who had polio and experienced after-effects have a post-polio disability. They are not currently experiencing the disease. Do not imply disease with people whose disability has resulted from anatomical or physiological damage (e.g., person with spina bifida or cerebral palsy). Reference to the disease associated with a disability is acceptable only with chronic diseases, such as arthritis, Parkinson’s disease or multiple sclerosis. People with disabilities should never be referred to as “patients” or “cases” unless their relationship with their doctor is under discussion.

LISTED BELOW ARE PREFERRED WORDS THAT REFLECT A POSITIVE ATTITUDE IN PORTRAYING DISABILITIES:

- *Brain injury.* Describes a condition where there is long-term or temporary disruption in brain function resulting from injury to the brain. Difficulties with cognitive, physical, emotional or social functioning may occur. Use “person with a brain injury,” “woman who has sustained brain injury” or “boy with an acquired brain injury.”
- *Cleft lip.* Describes a specific congenital disability involving lip and gum. The term “hare lip” is anatomically incorrect and stigmatizing. Use “person who has a cleft lip” or “a cleft palate.”
- *Deaf.* Deafness refers to a profound degree of hearing loss that prevents understanding speech through the ear. “Hearing impaired” and “hearing loss” are generic terms used by some individuals to indicate any degree of hearing loss – from mild to profound. These terms include people who are hard of hearing and deaf. However, some individuals completely disfavor the term “hearing impaired.” Others prefer to use “deaf”, “hard of hearing” or hearing loss.” “Hard of hearing” and “hearing loss” refers to a mild to moderate hearing loss that may or may not be corrected with amplification. Use “woman who is deaf,” “boy who is hard of hearing,” “individuals with hearing losses” and “people who are deaf or hard of hearing.”
- *Disability.* General term used for a functional limitation that interferes with a person’s ability to, for example, walk, lift, hear or learn. It may refer to a physical, sensory or mental condition. Use as a descriptive noun or adjective, such as “person living with AIDS,” “woman who is blind” or “man with a disability.” “Impairment” refers to loss or abnormality of an organ or body mechanism, which may result in a disability.
- *Disfigurement.* Refers to physical changes caused by burn, trauma, disease or congenital problems.

- *Down syndrome*. Describes a chromosome disorder that usually causes a delay in physical, intellectual and language development. Usually results in mental retardation. “Mongol” or “mongoloid” is unacceptable.
- *Handicap*. Not a synonym for disability. Describes a condition or barrier imposed by society, the environment or by one’s self. Many individuals prefer “inaccessible” or “not accessible” to describe social and environmental barriers. “Handicap” can be used when citing laws and situations, but should not be used to describe a disability. Do not refer to people with disabilities as “the handicapped” or “handicapped people.” Say “the building is not accessible for a wheelchair-user” or “The stairs are a handicap for her.”
- *HIV/AIDS*. Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome is an infectious disease resulting in the loss of the body’s immune system to ward off infections. The disease is caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). A positive test for HIV can occur without symptoms of the illnesses, which usually develop up to 10 years later, including tuberculosis, recurring pneumonia, cancer, recurrent vaginal yeast infections, intestinal ailments, chronic weakness and fever and profound weight loss. Preferred: “people living with HIV,” “people with AIDS” or “living with AIDS.”
- *Mental disability*. The Federal Rehabilitation Act (Section 504) lists four categories under mental disability: “psychiatric disability,” “*retardation,” “learning disability” or “cognitive impairment” is acceptable. **Intellectual disability is preferred by most groups*
- *Nondisabled*. Appropriate term for people without disabilities. “Normal,” “able-bodied,” “healthy” or “whole” are inappropriate.
- *Seizure*. Describes an involuntary muscular contraction, a brief impairment or loss of consciousness, etc., resulting from a neurological condition such as epilepsy or from an acquired brain injury. Rather than “epileptic,” say “girl with epilepsy” or “boy with a seizure disorder.” The term “convulsion” should be used only for seizures involving contraction of the entire body.
- *Spastic*. Describes a muscle with sudden abnormal and involuntary spasm. Not appropriate for describing someone with cerebral palsy or a neurological disorder. Muscles, not people, are spastic.
- *Stroke*. Caused by interruption of blood to brain. Hemiplegia (paralysis on one side) may result. “Stroke survivor” is preferred over “stroke victim.”

The Indiana Governor’s Council for People with Disabilities would like to acknowledge the Research and Training Center on Independent Living at the University of Kansas for the usage rights of the “Guidelines.”